"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

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PRISONERS OF SILENCE.

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CHAPTER XX.

The furniture and appointments that constituted the claim of the room to the title of "furnished sitting-room" were all good of their kind, and in that inoffensive, if uninteresting, taste which has superseded in such apartments—in desirable neighbourhoods at least—the glaring hideousness of thirty years ago.

The room had, however, presumably been occupied by its present owner for some length of time, and the sign manual of that occupant's tastes and pursuits had subdued its original character into a mere background.

A great writing-table with pigeonholed back, and drawers wherever drawers might be—a feature certainly never introduced by the original furnisher—was the most conspicuous object in the room. Ponderous-looking books seemed to fill every corner; on a table in one of the windows stood a large, brass-mounted microscope, and near the fireplace was an eminently practical-looking arm-chair. Stuck in the looking-glass over the chimney-piece were sundry cards of invitation.

The clock on the mantelshelf pointed to ten minutes to three. It was a mild April day, one of the windows was open, and the soft spring-scented air stirred gently about the figure of the solitary occupant of the room, as he leaned back in the arm-chair before mentioned and finished a late luncheon with a cigarette. It was North Branston.

It was an older-looking man, and a harder-looking man than the North Branston who had left Alnchester two years before. The dark face had gained noticeably in power; the lines of thought were more deeply graven on his forehead; the deep-set eyes were keener and more penetrating. But the lines of thought were not the only lines with which time had dealt somewhat heavily. The old air of grim, passive endurance seemed to have slipped away, pressed out by the wear and work of daily life before an indescribable settling of the whole face. The contemptuous cynicism about his mouth, the coldness of his whole expression, no longer conveyed any suggestion of serving a defensive purpose; they had developed uncompromisingly; and nowhere in the face was there any trace of those pleasanter developements which should have softened and restrained them.

It was a less disagreeable face, inasmuch as its bitterness was less aggressive, more reserved and overlaid; but it was a more disagreeable face, inasmuch as the possibilities which it contained were fewer.

He finished his cigarette slowly, his brows drawn together in an expression of thought which was rather that of a man whose habit it is to think deeply than of a man personally interested in his subject. Then he rose, glanced at the luncheon tray, and laid his hand on the bell. Before he had rung it, however, a short, assured rap fell on the door, and it opened quickly. It admitted a tall man, of presumably about five-and-fifty, with iron-grey hair, and well-cut features, keen and rather unsympathetic in expression. He wore the professional frock-coat, and there was that about him which marks the man who is "somebody" in his own line.

He greeted North Branston with a friendly nod.

"Thought I should find you, Branston," he said. "I wanted to see you about that case in the accident ward. I've just been in to have a look at it."

"I would have waited if I had expected you," returned North.

"No consequence! It doesn't need me. From what Phillips tells me, you've made an excellent thing of it."

There was a cordial approval in the speaker's voice, and a certain respect dominated the latent patronage of his manner.

But North received the approbation without the slightest sign of satisfaction.

"I think we shall save it," he said.

"And it's a very remarkable case," pursued the other man; "so I thought I'd look in as I was passing, and give you a suggestion that occurred to me. Look here, have you thought of this?"

A brief technical colloquy ensued, and then the elder man turned to depart.

"All right," he said. "It's a point I had not considered. It's an interesting experiment at any rate; we may as well try it. By-the-bye," he stopped with his hand on the door. "They've offered you the lectureship, I hear."

"Yes."

"Good! I congratulate you! See you to-night?"

"Yes."

The elder man nodded approvingly and departed.

Left to himself, North Branston carried out his previous intention of ringing the bell, and then he sat down before his writing-table. He drew a letter out of an envelope, glanced through its contents, and wrote and directed a brief note.

Fortune, during the past two years, had been conspicuously kind to North Branston. The appointment with which he had come to London had been resigned by him, in six months, in favour of a post in connection with the same hospital of a far more responsible and important nature. His recent visitor was Dr. Slade-Fenton, one of the best known medical men of the day, who combined with a large "society" practice an all-important position in connection with the hospital to which North was attached. Dr. Slade-Fenton was Archdeacon French's brother-in-law. He had known something of North Branston in his earlier days, and on his reappearance in London he had quickly detected and appraised his more mature powers. He had found the younger man useful, and he had extended towards him that somewhat pushing patronage without the help of which even such abilities as North's may sometimes remain long unappreciated by the world at large. It was said in a good many quarters that a share in Dr. Slade-Fenton's practice, which would amount to a practical partnership, was open to North Branston if he should choose to accept it. Dr. Slade-Fenton was, indeed, very desirous that he should accept it; but, at present, private practice seemed to offer no attractions to North. And such time as was left him by his duties at the hospital he occupied with the literary and scientific sides of his profession. The letter which he had just written was an acceptance of an important lectureship which had never before been offered to so young a man. North Branston, at thirty-three, was on the high-road to a position of singular prominence in his profession.

There was no suggestion of elation about him, however, as he stamped his envelope and put it on one side for the post. Nor did his expression change at all, as will the expression of a man interrupted in a train of personally interesting thought, when the door was again opened by the servant. He turned his head mechanically.

"I beg pardon, sir," said the woman, "there's a gentleman downstairs. I told him that I thought you were busy, sir, but he says he's quite sure you will see him. Mr. Bryan Armitage, he told me to say."

The woman's manner witnessed to the fact that North Branston was by no means patient of interruption by visitors. He glanced at the clock as she finished speaking, and then said tersely:

"Ask him to come up."

The woman disappeared, and a minute or two later, Bryan Armitage entered the room. He came eagerly towards North with outstretched hand.

"How are you, North?" he exclaimed. "It is luck to find you in. You don't seem to encourage visitors, though! I was received as though I were no end of a phenomenon. How are you? I say, what an age it is since we met, and how glad I am to see you!"

He was shaking North's hand by this time with a grip that seemed loth to loosen itself; but North Branston rather allowed than returned the enthusiastic hand-shake as he said, with no quickening or warming of his deep, cold tones:

"How are you, Armitage? What are you doing in town? Sit down."

Bryan, tacitly accepting the invitation, glanced at him with a touch of half-disappointed surprise in his eyes.

"Oh, you haven't heard, then?" he said. "I thought they might perhaps have mentioned it in your Alnchester letters. I am transferred. My uncle has got me into one of the big London firms, and they are sending me abroad."

"That means promotion, I suppose," said North.

Bryan Armitage made a rather hurried gesture of negation.

"Not particularly," he said. "I—I wanted a change."

He went on in a lighter tone, and as though passing to a subject more likely to be interesting to his interlocutor:

"I called on Mrs. Vallotson to say good-bye a day or two before I came away, but I expect you've heard since then and your news is later than mine. I hope they're all well."

North Branston had seated himself in his writing-table chair, and he now leaned back, crossing his legs and folding his arms as he said impassively:

"I hear from Alnchester very occasionally. They were all right, I suppose, when you came away?"

For the first time something in North Branston's voice and manner seemed to arrest Bryan Armitage's attention. He looked for a moment rather dubiously at North. And in the pause, and in the half-perplexed, half-attentive expression which crossed his face, certain changes which the past year had wrought upon his boyishness became for the moment strikingly apparent. Bryan Armitage seemed to have grown far more than two years older. The old buoyancy of his spirits seemed to have left him; his voice, in spite of the boyish phrases that still appeared here and there in his talk, had a graver and more manly ring. The twinkle and sparkle of irrepressible humour still lurked in his eyes, but it seemed to be temporarily overlaid with a certain wistful sadness.

"Oh, yes," he said rather slowly. "They—Mrs. Vallotson was quite well. Everybody says she's looking wonderfully well, and Dr. Vallotson, too."

"And Constance?" North shot a glance at his visitor, half amused, half contemplative in its mingling of recollection and penetration. "You've got over that little disappointment by this time, I hope, Armitage?"

Bryan coloured a deep, painful red.

"I'm not that sort, North," he said hurriedly. "It wasn't that kind of affair with me. But Constance is not at home just now. Didn't you know that?"

North shook his head indifferently, and Bryan went on with a kind of hesitating confidence:

"She's been away since Christmas, staying with some people in the country. I'm awfully sorry to say there was a row, though I did my best. And Mrs. Vallotson thought——well, she was rather sent away, don't you see?"

He spoke in a low, pained voice, not looking at North; and he did not see the slight smile with which the latter regarded him.

"A row?" he observed. "What about?"

"Oh, Connie had plans, you know. We won't trot them out, I think."

A vague sense of the total want of sympathy in the tone of the question seemed to be influencing Bryan as he glanced, half defiantly, half wistfully, at North.

"She wanted to stir things up a bit in Alnchester, and I couldn't hold her in. Of course I gave myself away a bit over what happened before you left, or I might have managed better. And—well, Mrs. Vallotson didn't quite see her plans, and Connie didn't see giving them up. That was all."

"Ah!"

North Branston did not smile as he uttered this laconic comment. His face was dark and sardonic. Then he seemed to return to the consideration of his visitor's affairs.

"You've not had a particularly pleasant winter, then, I conclude?"

A quick, short sigh came from Bryan, contrasting oddly, as did his tone, with the boyish frankness of his words:

"I've had a brute of a time," he said. "It wouldn't matter if it were not such a girl as Connie; but to see her spoiling herself with cranks, and not to be able to make her see that they are cranks, put it which way you will—is—is simply beastly, don't you know."

"So you've come away to avoid the spectacle?"

The careless amusement of North's tone seemed to penetrate straight through Bryan's simple confidence. He paused a moment and looked his host straight in the face.

"I've come away because I couldn't do any good," he said. "I believe I only make things worse, and I don't hold with moping and dawdling because one can't get what one wants."

The words implied a good deal more than was actually said, and perhaps the speaker thought that they implied even more than they did; for he coloured, having uttered them, and subsided into silence.

North received the speech with absolute placidity, and the conversation being thus thrown into his hands, seemed to have hardly sufficient impetus in himself either to pursue the original topic or to point a new one. Eventually he said, apparently simply for the sake of saying something:

"You said you were going abroad, didn't you? When and where?"

With a promptitude that showed his readiness to respond to any sign of interest on North's part, Bryan roused himself.

"To Constantinople," he said, "I shall be off next week, I expect. I should have looked you up before this if I hadn't been tied pretty closely at the bank. I've been looking forward to it awfully. One of the things I've principally thought of in coming to London, is seeing something of you, North, after these two years."

He stopped, and then continued with a rather forced cheeriness:

"London's an uncommonly dreary place somehow, when you don't know any one—even when you're hard at work. You never went through that, of course; you had heaps of friends when you came up."

He spoke a little wistfully, and then, North receiving his words in silence—which did not tend to promote conversation—he rose. There was an air of disappointment about him.

"You're busy, I expect," he said hesitatingly; he seemed to be struggling valiantly against a consciousness which he would not recognise. "Perhaps I'd better be off. I—I rather thought that you might have been able to come out for a walk. Never mind, I must go alone."

There was a cheery holding at bay of the rather dreary prospect that evidently unfolded itself before him, which seemed to influence North almost in spite of himself.

"What are you doing this evening?" he said carelessly, as he, too, rose.

The visitor stared.

"Doing? Oh, smoking and reading a bit, I suppose," he returned, in a voice that was evidently determined not to be rueful.

"You don't seem to look forward to it."

"Well, not particularly, perhaps," with a laugh; "it gets a trifle dull."

"I could take you to an affair that would be a good deal duller if you like—a party at the Slade-Fentons'. Mrs. Slade-Fenton is a sister of Archdeacon French's, at Alnchester, you know. It's a fashionable, intellectual affair, but it might amuse you."

There was a word of contempt for the affair in question in North Branston's tone, but Bryan Armitage did not notice it. The cloud had cleared from his face as if by magic, and his honest blue eyes were full of gratitude and enthusiasm.

"I should like it no end," he said. "I say, North, it is good of you. Wouldn't it bore you, though? It would be capital fun."

"I assure you it won't," said North. "But if you like to be here at nine o'clock, you can prove the fact for yourself. It's an early affair."

Bryan Armitage was not afflicted either with shyness or self-consciousness in any form. He was an eminently sociable soul, and when he reappeared at North's room at nine o'clock that evening, punctual to the moment, he was in high spirits; in spirits so high, indeed, and so permeated with warm-hearted cordiality, as to suggest an even violent reaction from the constraint of the morning.

"They're awful swells, aren't they—the Slade-Fentons?" he said, as their hansom turned into the street—in a most fashionable locality—in which the Slade-Fentons lived.

"They go in for society—yes," replied North tersely.

"Will there be a lot of people there to-night?"

North smiled rather grimly.

"Not what Mrs. Slade-Fenton would call a lot of people," he said. "It's the fashion to be 'cultured' just at present. Mrs. Slade-Fenton is going in for a series of debating evenings—topics of the day. This is one of them. I told you it would be dull."

The bald explanation was received with a moment's puzzled silence. Then Bryan said in a tone of keen curiosity:

"It will be no end new, whatever it may be besides. I say, here we are!"

The cab had stopped, and a few minutes later Bryan found himself following North, up the staircase of such a house as his unsophisticated eyes had never beheld, into the presence of his hostess.

Mrs. Slade-Fenton was not a tall woman, but she was amply and firmly developed, and carried herself with an air of self-conscious distinction. Her features were plain, but they were cleverly re-

deemed from insignificance by the abundance of red hair, which she wore turned back from her forehead. This eminently becoming hair, taken in conjunction with her well-preserved face, made her look far less than forty-five years. And combined with the rich and brilliant style of dress which she affected, it had procured her a reputation as a "fine-looking woman."

Mrs. Slade-Fenton was a woman belonging to a large class troubled with no inconveniently high perceptions, but gifted with considerable shrewdness and a keen eye for the main chance. The main chance, with Mrs. Slade-Fenton, was represented by that social prestige, that keeping of themselves well before their world, which she and her husband, in a practical, up-to-date fashion, recognised as being necessary to Dr. Slade-Fenton's professional well-being. And she had cultivated a position in society with ever-increasing resource and success for nearly fifteen years. It was a hobby with her to pose as one having a footing, so to speak, in two worlds—the world of fashion and the world of intellect. In the fashionable set to which she belonged, her assumption of intellectual proclivities had gone far towards individualising her. In the intellectual set, the cultivation of which was quite as necessary from a business point of view, the position which the Slade-Fentons held in society conferred upon them an undefined but quite undeniable distinction.

Frivolity having, as the century draws to a close, ceased to hold the fashionable field; and intellectuality of all kinds having become the thing; Mrs. Slade-Fenton, like a thorough woman of business, saw her opportunity and closed with it. The time had come for such a judicious amalgamation of her worlds as would cause a sensation in each. The present occasion represented such an amalgamation, having for its object the discussion of a social question recently started on one of the advanced magazines; and Mrs. Slade-Fenton was in her element.

Bryan Armitage's modest composure was not easily to be upset; but as he made his bow he was distinctly excited and even a little thrilled. The house and all its appointments "made a fellow feel so small," as he afterwards expressed it; he had caught a glimpse in the drawing-rooms beyond of faces known to him only, hitherto, through the pages of the illustrated papers; and his hostess herself, arrayed in deep violet velvet and old lace, and further endued with her most intellectual demeanour, was a presence calculated to inspire a respect not untouched with awe.

He heard North Branston's introduction of him, and the few words of explanation with which it was supplemented; words spoken with the indifferent assurance of a man confident as to his ground; with a rather curious expression stealing over his face. And the gracious reception accorded him deepened that expression.

"I am charmed to see you," said Mrs. Slade-Fenton. "Dr. Branston is quite at home here, and any friend of his is welcome." She turned to North as she finished with a manner which seemed to take possession of him in a matter-of-course fashion. "Let me see," she said. "Will Mr. Armitage care to speak? No?"—as Bryan interposed a hurried disclaimer. "Then we must see that he is established in good company. Olive! Where is Olive? By-the-bye, I hear that it is all right about the lectureship, Dr. Branston. A thousand congratulations."

The words were spoken in an interested, well-satisfied tone, and Bryan glanced at North, wondering as to the subject of congratulation.

"Thanks," said North briefly.

"You'll speak to-night, won't you? Now, you really must. Ah, here is Olive. You must settle it with her."

A tall, dark girl—not handsome but very well and strikingly dressed—was holding out her hand to North with a brilliant smile.

"Congratulations," she said. "Any quantity of them. You'll be in your element as a lecturer, Dr. Branston. I judge by your ever-expressive silence! Seriously, though, every one is delighted."

"Dr. Branston must be made to speak to-night," said Mrs. Slade-Fenton decisively. "It is quite his night. I put him in your charge, Olive. But first I want you to take care of his friend—Mr. Armitage, Miss Kenderdine. Introduce Mr. Armitage to some pleasant people and see that he has a good place."

Miss Kenderdine was evidently not a young woman of dawdling proclivities. She took stock of the individual thus commended to her care; appraised him, presumably, as uninteresting; and then said to him, with a little smile and gesture of temporary farewell to North:

"Suppose we go into the other room, then?"

To say that Bryan Armitage acquitted himself as creditably as he might have done during the ten minutes that followed,

would be wholly untrue. But the previous five minutes had provided him with sundry new ideas, which entirely prevented his rising to the occasion. He was introduced to some half-dozen people as "Dr. Branston's friend," a formula which never failed to act as a passport; and then Miss Kenderdine paused.

"You will do now, I think," she said lightly. "And I must go. You will find this an excellent place."

She turned away with an easy, supercilious little nod; and Bryan Armitage watched her cross the room to where North Branston stood, buttonholed by a distinguished political economist.

Further conversation was not expected of Dr. Branston's friend, but he used his eyes and ears throughout the evening with ever-deepening interest; and he used them to such purpose that when he finally found himself outside the house, and alone with North, he walked the whole length of the street in total silence.

Silence had apparently become North Branston's natural element, and he made no attempt to break it in this instance. It was Bryan who eventually said abruptly:

"Who is Miss Kenderdine?"

"She is a cousin of Slade-Fenton's. She lives with them."

There was another pause.

"Do you — you consider her a good-looking girl, I suppose?"

North Branston glanced round at his companion, a cynical little smile curling his lips.

"Are you smitten, my boy?" he said. "Waste of pains, I assure you!"

The young man flushed to the roots of his hair.

"Smitten!" he cried. "I? And with a girl like that? Why, she's a regular out-and-out society woman! I don't believe there's a bit of—of gentleness or anything of that kind in her!"

A slight laugh came from North, and Bryan Armitage stopped abruptly. The colour left his face as though with the consciousness of having made a dreadful mistake; and for quite a moment he stared blankly before him without making any attempt to speak. Then he faltered:

"I—I beg your pardon, North. I'm the biggest fool alive. I—beg your pardon!"

The cigar which North had lighted paused suddenly in its passage to his lips. Then it proceeded on its way.

"I'm not prepared to argue as to your mental status! But why beg my pardon?"

The words were spoken with the utmost deliberation, and Bryan received them with an awkward laugh.

"I suppose I'm only putting my foot into it worse," he said ruefully. "I suppose it isn't—you don't—— But you see, old fellow, coming in from outside with nothing to do but to look on, I couldn't help seeing how things are."

"How what things are?"

"Why, hang it all, North, you're rather hard on a man—you and Miss Kenderdine, of course." He stopped. "I—I suppose it's as good as settled?" he added tentatively and wistfully.

There was a moment's silence, and then North smiled.

"Yes," he said, "it's quite settled. I'm not a marrying man."

With a start of astonishment, not to be reduced to words, Bryan Armitage looked at his companion as though doubting the evidence of his ears. He looked away, looked back again, murmured vaguely: "I beg your pardon!" and then relapsed into total silence.

They reached the place where their ways parted with that silence unbroken, and again it was Bryan who broke it at last. He came to a standstill, with his eyes fixed on North, a puzzled and distressed expression standing out in them in strong relief.

"North," he said, in an odd, gentle tone, "I'd no idea, until to-night, that you were such a swell. I shan't see you again before I go away, I expect, and I should just like to say this, if you don't mind. I dare say I shouldn't have understood all it meant, but I—I wish you had told me about that lectureship. I—should like to have congratulated you."

As though that tone in Bryan's voice had touched, quite suddenly, something in North Branston of the very existence of which its owner was unconscious, his eyes softened strangely and involuntarily.

"You're quite mistaken," he said quickly. "I did not think of it; that was all."

"You did not think of it!"

There was a moment's pause as North shook his head. Then Bryan, with his face more puzzled than ever, held out his hand impulsively.

"You'll let me say I'm glad with all my heart," he said simply.

North Branston wrung his hand in a sudden, genuine grip.

"Thank you, Bryan, boy," he said.

His tone was hard no longer, but it was penetrated through and through with a deep, unconscious sadness.

OLD-FASHIONED WIT.

WIT changes its fashion as completely as clothes do theirs, but the changes are not so rapid or so frequent. If we glance at a collection of the "good things" of illustrious Greeks and Romans, we shall probably wonder, as Mr. Pickwick did on a memorable occasion, at the ease with which some people were amused. An exception might, perhaps, be made in favour of Themistocles, some of whose good things have quite a modern flavour. His reply to the native of Seriphos might have been made by a distinguished Parisian to an Auvergnat, though perhaps the modern would have put it more neatly. The story is quoted by Cicero in his "De Senectute," and is a proof that the great Roman orator, though he had no claim to be considered a "funny man" himself, could appreciate a neat retort. "When a certain native of the paltry island of Seriphos told Themistocles, in an altercation which arose between them, that he was indebted for the lustre of his fame not to the intrinsic splendour of his actions, but to the country in which he had had the good fortune to be born, 'It may be so,' replied the Athenian general, 'for if I had received my birth at Seriphos, I could have had no opportunity of producing my talents; but give me leave to tell you, that yours would never have made a figure though you had been born in Athens.'"

The answer displays what our ancestors would have termed "a pretty wit," but, as a rule, the witticisms of the ancient Greeks were very poor.

If the history of wit is ever written, considerable prominence would have to be given to the French wits of the eighteenth century. It was not a golden age, an age of brass rather, but brass lacquered to such a surprising degree that it looked like gold. Everybody who aspired to be considered genteel wished to be a wit, and, if he could not say smart things himself, he could at least sit by the couch of the Marquise, and whilst she sipped her chocolate and played with her lap-dog, relate to her the very last good thing which M. de Voltaire or M. Piron had uttered. The authors in that age fairly boiled over with repartee and were never dull—except in their books—but it must be owned that their wit lacked the right ring. There was nothing genial about it. A jest to be successful had to be spiteful or malicious, and every peal of laughter it raised was at the expense of some poor devil, and the more he winced under the satire the better the joke was thought.

In justice to these caustic wits it must be conceded that they were utterly fearless, and dreaded neither the master's sword nor the lackey's cudgel, nor the cells of the Bastille. One wit composed a scathing epigram on a certain feather-bed soldier who had been recently created a Marshal of France.

"He will probably give you a good beating for this," said a friend who perused the production. "I shall be happy to find that he can at all events make some use of his bâton," was the reply. Lenglet-Dufresnoy had paid so many visits to the Bastille that when he saw an "exempt" coming down the street in which he lived, he would call out to his housekeeper: "Pack up half-a-dozen shirts, and don't forget a packet of tobacco." The latter portion of the remark would tend to show that even at that time authors were treated as first-class misdemeanants, and were not debarred from the luxury of a smoke. An influential personage thought no more of asking a Minister for fifty blank "lettres de cachet" than a well-to-do gentleman of the present day would of asking his banker for a cheque-book, and got them quite as easily. If he was troubled with a disobedient son, or pestered by a pertinacious dun, he filled up one of these useful documents, handed it to an "exempt," and the person named was locked up until he promised to marry the young woman his father had looked out for him, or agreed to rule off the account in his ledger. Under such circumstances the wits might have been pardoned if they preferred the profitable "dedication" to the dangerous lampoon. Even Voltaire was put in durance vile in his young days, and it was not his fault that he did not go back to the Bastille directly after he came out. The Regent, who rightly judged that it would be better to have young Voltaire for a friend than for an enemy, sent the Marquis de Nocé to the Bastille with orders to release the young satirist, and bring him straight to the Palais Royal. The order was duly obeyed, and, late in the evening, Voltaire and the Marquis arrived at the Regent's Court. Whilst they were waiting in the antechamber a heavy thunderstorm occurred. There came a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a peal of thunder so deafening that an awed silence reigned amongst the courtiers for a few moments.

It was broken by Voltaire crying out in a loud voice: "Things could not be worse up there if Heaven were governed by a Regent." The Marquis de Nocé repeated this remark to the Duc d'Orleans, and suggested that Voltaire should be sent back to the Bastille, but the Regent only laughed, and promised the young wit a pension.

"I am much obliged to your Highness," said Voltaire, "for giving me the means to procure food, but I beg of you not to trouble yourself in future about my lodgings."

The principal rival and adversary to Voltaire was Piron, and the two rarely met without an interchange of witticisms, which often degenerated into downright Billingsgate. Piron's wit was sometimes of the brutal kind, and not even good at that; as, for instance, his reply when he was asked the address of Abbé Leblanc, who lived close to a blacksmith's forge, "Rue ——, next door to his bootmaker." But he could utter a very good thing sometimes. He said of Marmontel, who had written a book on French Poetry, that he was like Moses, who showed the Promised Land to others but never entered it himself. During one of his temporary fits of devotion the Archbishop of Paris came up to him as he was leaving Notre Dame and said:

"Monsieur Piron, have you read my last Pastoral Letter?"

"No, monseigneur; have you?" was the unexpected reply.

Much may be forgiven him, however, for the way in which he hammered away at the literary fossils who constituted the French Academy. Many were the witticisms penned or uttered by him against that effete body, and most of his remarks are as true now as they were then. When a Frenchman opens his "Temps" and finds eight solid columns of speeches—four of them a panegyric delivered by some newly-elected illustrious nobody on some dead and gone illustrious nobody, and four of them about French literature in general and its latest ornament, the newly-elected member, in particular — he cannot help agreeing with Piron that it would be better that the recipient of the honour should confine himself to saying simply: "Gentlemen, many thanks," to which the President of the Academy should reply: "Il n'y a pas de quoi." Yet there is always in the reader's mind a suspicion that all Piron's quips were due to jealousy, and that if he had been elected to the Academy, he could have been as tedious as his compeers, and have found it in his heart to bestow all his tediousness on his listeners.

Prominent amongst what may be called the second rank of wits were the Crébillons. The elder one has fallen into complete oblivion, though his contemporaries were of opinion that for "grandeur of sentiment" he was only surpassed by Corneille. A similar fate would have befallen the son, but for the fact that his books are supposed to contain a good deal of impropriety if anybody has the patience to find it. The father and son lived together, and were continually bickering. The father was eighty-one when he produced his best work, and it was generally believed that he was assisted by what in literary and legal circles is called a "devil," and in the art world is known as a "ghost." The "ghost" or "devil" was a comparatively unknown writer named Chartreux. A friend who was present at one of these frequent squabbles, thought to turn the conversation into a more pleasant channel by asking old Crébillon which he considered to be his best work.

"I don't know which is the best," said the old man, "but I am perfectly sure that that"—pointing to his son—"is my worst."

"Quite true," retorted the son. "I am the only one that Chartreux had nothing to do with."

It is pleasant to have to record that there was at least one great wit who did not lay the lash of his satire about him indiscriminately, and find his sole delight in touching friends and enemies "on the raw." Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle had quite as good a head as Voltaire, and certainly a much better heart. He was a prolific author, and; besides the volumes of poetical, historical, and scientific writings which he produced; he gave utterance to many good jokes. He had plenty of time in which to say good things, for he lived to a very great age; indeed, on the day of his death he was within five weeks of completing his hundredth year. Being asked when on his death-bed if he were in pain, he replied that there was nothing the matter with him except that he "experienced a difficulty in living." The reason why his life was so long was, he said, that he had made many friends and no enemies, and had always acted up to his two favourite mottoes: "Everything is possible," and "Everybody is right." Perhaps if he had a failing it was to insist too strongly upon the fact that he was the nephew of

Corneille—his mother was the great poet's sister—but his pride was pardonable. On the whole he was one of the most estimable characters of an age in which nobody was particularly virtuous and many people remarkably vicious. It might be said of him as it was of a writer who lived rather later, that "he passed his life in saying good of himself, but he never said harm of others."

Lemierre, the playwright—1733–1793—of whom this was said, was a light-hearted, happy-go-lucky mortal of no great talent as a writer, and was blessed with a young wife who was as pretty as a picture, and as joyous as a bird. She was his good angel, and he said that he used to pass his hand across her shoulders every morning to make sure that her wings had not sprouted. Other names also occur to my mind, but there is not space to speak of them at length now. Among them were Le Sage, the author of that wonderful "Gil Blas," which Macaulay declared he re-read every year of his life; Diderot, who was ever ready to help with money and advice any struggling brother of the pen who came to him; and Saint Foix, whose bluff free speech and Breton obstinacy were always getting him into scrapes.

Perhaps the most curious fact in connection with these dead and gone writers is that many of them owe such shreds of literary renown as they still enjoy to the spontaneous utterances of their wit, and not to what they would have deemed the best efforts of their imagination. Many of them wrote tragedies—dull, cold, heavy productions, every line of which had been polished till what little soul it originally possessed had been rubbed out of it. Such incidents as the dramas could boast were drowned under floods of talk. If the hero wished to stab his wife he stood still with uplifted dagger whilst he poured out a good five hundred rhymed alexandrines, and whilst he rested after this tremendous performance, the lady "got off her chest," as actors call it, a like amount of verse in the shape of an appeal about as passionate and heart-stirring as those heard in the Law Courts when a barrister is showing cause why a mandamus should be issued. These plays have long passed into oblivion, and did not even live till Victor Hugo gave the "coup de grâce" to the school to which they belonged. The names of the authors are in many cases almost forgotten, or are to be found only in literary manuals, or in the compilations of the erudite M. Fournier, and the industrious M. Louis Loire. But it may sometimes happen to the literary student to enter a quiet, out-of-the-way Paris church, and in one of the side chapels to find a fresh wreath of immortelles placed upon a tomb or reared against a tablet. If he can manage, by the aid of what little light falls through the dusty stained-glass window, or comes from the dimly-burning little votive candles, slowly guttering away on their iron spikes, to decipher the inscription, he may, perhaps, read on the tomb or tablet the name of one who, a century and a half ago, was wont to set the table in a roar, and whose opinion on poetry and other cognate subjects was listened to with respect even by the Most Christian King; but who, to-day, is forgotten by all save the remote descendant who placed the wreath upon the tomb, and a few scholars, who, in poring over the old books in a big library, have lighted upon some old book of Ana which recorded the sayings of the old-fashioned wits.

LIBERTY AND LICENSE.

It may, perhaps, be considered rather late in the day to discuss the recent crusade of the goody-goody brigade against the music-halls; but the members of the London County Council will have to seek re-election next March, and it would be a thousand pities if the constituencies were allowed to forget, in the meanwhile, what took place when the managers of the Empire Theatre of Varieties applied for their music and dancing license last month.

A good deal of rather hysterical writing and speech-making was unfortunately indulged in after the decision of the Theatres and Music-Halls Committee of the County Council and before the meeting of the Council itself; and the somewhat intemperate zeal of the more strenuous advocates of freedom and common-sense had the inevitable result of seriously obscuring the main point at issue. Personal abuse of the leaders of the attack on the Empire could not by any possibility prove anything, and undoubtedly led a good many people to sympathise with Mrs. Ormiston Chant and her egregious allies, who would otherwise have taken a more reasonable view of the extraordinary revolution which the general adoption of their views must inevitably bring about in the amusements of the people. For it is nothing less than a revolution that these people want. Mrs. Chant told an interviewer, after the fateful twenty-sixth of October, that she had this year left the

Alhambra alone because she felt that the Empire was as much as she could manage at one time; but that she proposed to deal with all the other music-halls in turn.

Now, it is quite fair to believe that the lady is perfectly single-minded and honest as to the faith that is in her in regard to these matters, and at the same time to take every means to prevent her carrying her mistaken and narrow views into effect. Mrs. Chant may not—and I believe does not—deserve the accusations of self-righteousness and Phariseeism, not to mention worse things, which have been hurled indiscriminately at her. She may be an excellent lady with the best possible intentions; but public opinion, I think, will effectually prevent her having any serious or lasting influence over the public amusements. Her attack was carefully and cleverly planned in secret, and sprung upon the public at the very last minute. Such tactics frequently result in a temporary success, but very rarely indeed "come off" a second time.

The one point in the business on which the people of London ought for their own sakes to concentrate their attention, is the behaviour of the majority of the members of the County Council in this matter, and the irrefutable evidence which they have themselves given of their absolute unfitness to be entrusted with any functions of a judicial character. As a sort of glorified vestry they may have their uses, although even in that capacity they have won but little popularity or respect; as a debating society they are occasionally amusing; but as a judicial body, bound to decide important questions on the evidence that may be laid before them, they are not only ridiculous but, to put it in plain English, absolutely scandalous and disgraceful.

It is not necessary for the purposes of this argument to follow Mrs. Chant's demands as to the conduct of the music-halls to their logical end. The whole question of the regulation of places of popular amusements and of the amount of liberty which is to be enjoyed by persons, even of immoral life, so long as they behave themselves properly and conform to the rules laid down for the general comfort and convenience, is too large a one to be discussed here at the present time; too large a one to be materially affected by a catch vote of such a body as the London County Council. The public in this matter, as it is to be hoped in many others, will be too strong for the Council in the long run, and the Councillors are not at all unlikely to find themselves before long the objects of that reforming zeal of which there is so much going about just at present. Let us by all means progress a little, at all events, in that direction when the Ides of March give us the opportunity. Let us, if we can, give Mrs. Chant another audience to address when she tackles the Alhambra, the Palace, or the Pavilion next year.

Meantime it may be well, without excitement or exaggeration, briefly to consider exactly what took place the other day in connection with the Empire Theatre.

For several years the proprietors of the Empire had enjoyed the license which they had held up to last month; the promenade, against which so much has been said, had been constructed in obedience to the requirements of the Council; the drinking arrangements stood on exactly the same footing. The place was thoroughly well managed, both as regarded the stage and the auditorium; the arrangements for the repression and regulation of the undesirable class of visitors whom it is absolutely impossible to keep out of any place of public assembly, from fashionable churches downwards, were recognised as being as good as they could possibly be. The inspectors—whom the County Council pays to keep a sharp look out over the music-halls, and who are not at all likely to take as their motto, "surtout point de zèle"—had no complaints to make against the entertainments before or behind the curtain. The public had as little to say as the inspectors. The public were equally well satisfied. Everything that skill could devise or the lavish expenditure of capital carry out, was done for them, and the Empire Theatre of Varieties had arrived at the fortunate position of being one of the most successful and popular places of public entertainment ever known in London.

Nothing could have seemed more secure than all this. The shareholders must have thought nothing less likely to meet with any serious check or hindrance; but they had reckoned without their County Council. When licensing day came round there was to be a rude awakening. A few absolutely unknown and irresponsible people—who showed in every word of what they and the Licensing Committee of the County Council absurdly called their "evidence," their complete ignorance of the merits of the question, and their absolute unfitness to give even an opinion on the matters at issue—opposed the renewal of the license; and the Committee, without the slightest consideration

of, or reference to, the perfectly well-known facts of the case, decided in their favour by imposing, as the only condition on which they would grant the new license, certain restrictions and structural alterations which the directors of the theatre declared to be almost impossible to carry out.

It should by no means be forgotten that Alderman Routledge, himself one of the most Radical of the Progressists, stated afterwards in his speech at the meeting of the Council, that this Committee had been systematically packed in the interests of one particular section, who had done everything they could to ruin the industry of music-halls in London. If this is really their object—and Alderman Routledge generally knows very well what he is talking about—they could not set to work more effectually than to lower the tone of the music-halls by driving out of the business all men of means who look for some reasonable security for their invested capital, and by throwing the trade into the hands of mere hand-to-mouth adventurers who have nothing to lose, and a good deal to win if luck chances to be favourable.

There remained an appeal from the decision of this precious Committee to the Council itself, and it cannot be said that, in the interval, the tactics of the managers of the Empire or their friends on the press were in any way judicious. A strenuous agitation was got up, many meetings were held, and many speeches were made which, no doubt, were true enough and not to be answered by any fair argument; but which were, unfortunately, admirably adapted to put up the backs of the narrow-minded, illogical men who constitute the majority of the Council, and in that way seriously to damage the cause they were intended to serve.

When the appeal was heard before the full Council, any idea of judicial gravity, decency, or reticence was thrown to the winds. The feeble opinions of Mrs. Ormiston Chant were accepted as if they were really serious evidence; all the individual Councillors who in speeches of more or less violence and irrelevancy addressed the meeting in opposition to the Empire constituted themselves with absolutely shameless partiality at once witnesses, advocates, and judges, and endorsed the original decisions of the Committee by a large majority. It was an unfortunate thing for the shareholders in the Empire Theatre, but, as an object lesson in one of the most crying evils and scandals of government by popularly elected representatives of the few people who can be got to vote at municipal elections in London, it was not without its uses.

It is not too much to say that hardly a speaker on either side showed any real appreciation of the fact that a serious principle was involved, or that the decision of the Council was likely to have far-reaching effects, but the general tone of those in favour of granting the license unhampered by restrictions was undoubtedly better than that of their opponents, if only because they had a better case. In speech after speech on the opposition side the speakers gave themselves entirely away in the attempt to explain their views, and only made more and more apparent the narrow-minded personal bigotry which afflicted them. Several speakers expressed the idiotic opinion that no place which paid seventy per cent. by way of dividend could possibly be conducted in a respectable manner; others talked about women "ramping all over the place," although there had been no attempt on anybody's part to assert that anything of the sort occurred. It would hardly be possible to say what nonsense was not talked. Unfortunately I have no space at my command to give a general summary of the debate, but may call attention to the speeches of two typical members of the majority — Lord Farrer and Mr. John Burns. Lord Farrer, who made a sad confession of the anxiety and doubt which the reading of what he called the "evidence" had produced in him, was evidently terribly embarrassed—respectable, politico-economical, hide-bound red-tapist as he is—by having to keep in line with the Progressist party with which he acts, but with which he has as much real sympathy as the Girondists had with the Jacobins, and finally voted against the license—principally, it would seem, because "Mr. Macready, the great actor," had reformed the shameful saloons of the theatres fifty or sixty years ago. Mr. John Burns hardly tried to keep secret the merely personal reasons which influenced his vote. Mr. George Shipton had spoken at a public meeting in sympathy with the employees of the Empire Theatre who would be thrown out of work by the refusal of the license, and this without first obtaining permission from the mighty man of Battersea. So Mr. Burns, as "the man who had polled more votes than anybody else as a labour representative"—"Codlin's the friend, not Short"—was bound to take the opposite view. The male frequenters

of the Empire promenade smoked expensive cigars, and so offended Mr. Burns. The directors of the Empire had fought for their property, and Mr. Burns was not going to be intimidated. Equally cogent and equally unworthy of consideration were the other arguments which Mr. Burns put forward in dealing with what he rightly called a difficult and complex subject, and which influenced him in making in his judicial capacity a speech which was remarkable, even for him, for personal abuse and violent intolerance. It was distinctly humorous, by the way, to find Mr. Burns gravely warning the Council against "bogus sympathies with unemployed working people." Events move rapidly nowadays, but people can still remember that it was to his adroit manipulation of "bogus sympathies with unemployed working people" that the elect of Battersea—to which constituency the consideration of this sneer may be left—owes the position he has attained in the ranks of the new democracy.

The County Council has long been desirous of obtaining control of the theatres. Let us hope that their last escapade will not only render this impossible, but will lead to their mischievous power over the music-halls being taken away from them. That bigotry and narrow-minded intolerance are not the sole property of elected bodies I know very well—it was only the other day that the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University made himself ridiculous by prohibiting a performance of Mr. Sydney Grundy's play, "Sowing the Wind"—but I am quite certain that the interests of music-hall proprietors, managers, and performers, as well as those of public decency and public convenience, would be much safer in the hands of the Lord Chamberlain than in those of Lord Farrer, Mr. Burns, Mr. Lidgett, Mr. Charrington, Mr. M'Dougall, Earl Compton, Mr. Parkinson, and the rest of them. Let us hope that Parliament will take the same view of the matter—at all events after the impending general election.

Consider, for a moment, Mr. Irving's "Municipal Theatre" under the control of the present London County Council!

RIPPLE'S RELISH.

A COMPLETE STORY.

"A SMALL bottle of sauce, please," said I. "Stinger's if you have it."

"Yes, sir; certainly, sir, we have it," replied the grocer in the tone of a man who has more things in stock than are dreamt of in his customer's philosophy. "But let me persuade you to try a similar and superior article of our own preparation—Ripple's Relish, sir—which we can do for you at three-three instead of four-and-a-half."

As all sauces are much alike to me, and in those days I found it easier to save three farthings than to earn them, I did not need persuading.

"Very well," said I, after wondering for a moment what my wife would say, "I'll try it."

"Thank you, sir," said the grocer; "and if you'll pardon the liberty, I assure you that after trying you'll go on buying, as our poet says. Martha, my dear, cash. Three-three out of four. Your bill and change, sir. Good morning."

The somewhat disproportionate formality with which Mr. Ripple conducted this, our first business transaction, was, I afterwards found, habitual. Every penny he received—and he received a good many single pennies—he handed over to his wife, who sat all day at a desk behind a glass partition, taking for it a receipt which he passed on to the customer with a most impressive bow and flourish.

These receipt forms were adorned with a representation of Mr. Ripple's place of business—a vast emporium—with "Ripple's People's Tea Warehouse" running round the cornice in giant letters. The windows in this picture exhibited a bewildering variety of good things, which, to judge by the piles of bags and boxes to be seen as far as the eye could penetrate into the long perspective of the interior, was but a meagre sample of the stores within.

Outside those windows an aristocratic-looking and interested crowd had halted to inspect their contents. Gentlemen in tall hats and frock-coats pointed out to fashionably dressed ladies, who held them affectionately by the arm, an alluring pile of "Ripple's Best Loaf," at four-three-farthings; but the ladies, to a woman, were concentrating their attention on that more expensive luxury, "Ripple's Champion Tea" at one-and-eight, several chests of which were displayed behind the next sheet of plate-glass.

In and out of the door poured two streams of customers, one welcomed by a faultlessly attired individual—was it a fancy portrait of the proprietor himself?—and the other followed by obsequious attendants carrying parcels to the line of carriages in waiting which filled one side of the street.

The houses on the other side of the street looked mean, and the pavement in front of them was tenanted solely by two dogs and a child with a hoop. Lest my readers share my wife's wonder how such a splendid shop came to be situated in a street so obviously too small for it, let me hasten to explain that the street—a by-thoroughfare near Camberwell Green—was depicted as it was; the shop, as its owner no doubt wished it to be.

But however much the artist who designed Mr. Ripple's billhead had exaggerated the size of Mr. Ripple's shop, Mr. Ripple himself did not exaggerate the merits of his relish. Even my wife, in spite of her prejudice in favour of Stinger's, was forced to admit that it was excellent; and my wife is a judge of sauces.

As the poet, quoted by Mr. Ripple, foretold, after trying we went on buying, and after we had bought relish and relish only from him for some time, we allowed him—I here use his own words—to have the privilege of supplying us with other articles: tea, coffee, sugar, bacon; anything, in short, in which he dealt.

We granted him this privilege perhaps more readily than we otherwise should have done because he was willing to supply us on credit, and, as he went on supplying us for a considerable period without pressing for payment of his account, it was naturally difficult to refuse to concede him the even greater privilege of social intercourse. As we owed him, I think, about ten pounds when he first asked us to take a friendly cup of tea "along with me and my missis," I need hardly say that we accepted the invitation with at least outward alacrity.

He, or perhaps I should say, Mrs. Ripple, gave us an excellent tea, but after it was over, I feared for a moment that we had been inveigled into the little parlour behind the shop under disgracefully false pretences.

"And now, Mr. Trevor," said Mr. Ripple, "while my missis amuses yours with the halbum, perhaps you and me can talk a little business."

"Oh! Er—yes, certainly if you wish it," I stammered out. "But next week would be more convenient."

"Not it," said Mr. Ripple, looking not a little offended. "I guess what you have in your mind, sir, but I'm not mean enough to be alluding to that, except in a sense to which I don't suppose you'll object. Now, what do you say to a chance of working off any little matter there may be between us?"

Not having the ghost of an idea of the man's meaning, I said nothing, but waited for him to explain.

"You see, sir, it's this way," he went on. "I know that relish of mine is worth pushing, and properly pushed it never has been, mainly through want of capital. Now my idea is that you, being a literary gent, could help me to push it if you'd be so good."

"Really, Mr. Ripple, I don't see how," I protested with some warmth, "unless, indeed, you expect me to turn myself into a sandwich man."

"No, no," said he soothingly. "Nothing of the kind. I simply want you to try your hand at something catching in the advertisement line. Poetry for choice. Something beginning say, 'Ripple's Relish, rich and rare,' or, 'Ripple's Relish is the best.' Them two lines have been running in my head for months, but blessed if I can find the fellows to 'em. Now if——"

"But I thought you were already provided with a poet," I interrupted.

"I was," replied the grocer gloomily. "I was. And a good man too, when not in liquor. But gin finished him. Now, if you'd condescend to fill his place I'd make it worth your while, upon my word I would."

Professional pride urged me to resent Mr. Ripple's offer. Poverty tempted me to accept it. There was—nay, is—a delicacy about my purely literary work, a fineness of point about my stories which the average editor is incapable of appreciating. As I had therefore for some time been compelled to earn the greater portion of my bread by mere journalistic drudgery, it was comparatively easy to take another downward step.

There is no need to dwell upon the details of my degradation. Suffice it to say that for three months or so I puffed "Ripple's Relish" poetically and otherwise as it had never been puffed before. Unfortunately the public were slow to respond to my exhortations. The sale of the relish, which already enjoyed a considerable local reputation, remained almost stationary, even though, working in no hireling spirit, I was prodigal in suggesting methods of giving my praises of its merits the widest possible publicity.

These suggestions Mr. Ripple, to do him justice, was not slow in adopting as far as his means would allow. His means, however, were limited, and at last he came, as he vulgarly put it, almost to the end of his tether. Instead of placarding walls and hoardings with poetical and occasionally pictorial posters he had to content himself with distributing wretched little handbills, bought at the

lowest possible rate per thousand. Literary worm though I was, I turned at this. It was so unutterably painful to me to see the effusions of my brain thrust by some impudent urchin into the half-unwilling hand of the chance passer-by, only to be forthwith tossed aside and trampled underfoot, that I made up my mind to write no more unless Mr. Ripple would promise to present my productions to the public in something like decent form; but before I had an opportunity of acquainting him with my resolution I was taken ill, and was, for a considerable period, unable to write anything for anybody whether I would or no.

I do not wish to deny that the Ripples were very kind during my illness. Mrs. Ripple was one of those excellent women known to their friends as "motherly bodies" or "good souls."

"Beef extract, my dear!" said she to my wife. "Don't you go to worry yourself about that, nor yet about nothing else that's in Ripple's stock or can be got in. And as for a nurse, well, we must see what we can do between us, sitting up turn and turn about."

Until I had that illness I had no idea how many delicacies suitable to an invalid one's grocer can supply, nor, until I recovered from it, did I realise how extremely irksome a debt of gratitude may become. Though I never paid a penny piece in hard cash for them, I consider that the little luxuries with which the Ripples furnished me were dearly bought. The price they demanded for their tinned soups, grapes, jellies, and so forth, was nothing less than our friendship, our intimate friendship. Now, to take tea occasionally with the Ripples was one thing. To have my society persistently sought by Mr. Ripple whenever he was at leisure was quite another. My experiences one Sunday afternoon, when he induced me to go with him by boat to Gravesend, were painful in the extreme, but my wife assures me that my sufferings were slight compared with hers on the never-to-be-forgotten day when she accompanied Mrs. Ripple on a shopping expedition to the West End.

We did our best to make the Ripples understand how preposterous it was to expect us to satisfy their claim to public recognition of their lien upon our gratitude, but hints were wasted on them, and they seemed impervious to snubs. I doubt whether they were even aware of their social inferiority to us. The narrow circle in which they moved was chiefly made up of people even more destitute than themselves of the elements of culture and refinement, and it probably never dawned upon them that anybody could possibly be ashamed to be seen with them anywhere.

To do us justice we were not, or we did not let them see that we were, ashamed to be seen with them—in their own neighbourhood—into which nobody worth knowing was likely to stray. We ourselves had only been driven to take refuge there by stress of financial weather, and when the depression filled up—soon after my recovery a legacy from a distant relative placed me in a position of temporary and strictly comparative affluence—we at once prepared to slip our cables, if that nautical manœuvre may be taken as equivalent to going away and leaving no address.

Little did we guess what we were about to lose when we decided to leave Camberwell for Hampstead and cut all connection with the Ripples. I had been offered on certain conditions, one of which was the investment of my little capital in the venture, the assistant-editorship of the "Passing Hour," a newly-established journal of considerable promise. How was I to know that that promise would never blossom into performance? When I met Mr. Ripple casually in the street the very day before we moved, how was I to know that he?—but I must not anticipate.

"Trevor, my boy," said he, greeting me with even more than his usual unseemly boisterousness, "congratulate me. I've come into money."

"I'm delighted to hear it, only I hope it isn't enough to retire on. I don't want to find my occupation gone, you know," said I, thinking it judicious to throw a little dust into his eyes.

"Occupation gone?" he repeated, looking puzzled. "Oh, I see; you mean the poetry making. But you needn't be afraid. Every penny's going into the relish. It's a man or a mouse with William Ripple this time. I wonder if you're game to stand in?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, beginning to fear he had heard of the improvement in my circumstances, and hoped to induce me to sacrifice my little all on the altar of his faith in the potentialities of his relish.

"Come in here and have a drink, and I'll tell you," said he.

My fears proved groundless. He wanted me to go into partnership with him, it is true, but he was generous enough to say that he considered my brains more than

equivalent to his cash. So flattering was this compliment, so plausible were the figures he put before me, and so contagious was his enthusiasm that, instead of refusing then and there to have anything to do with his proposal, I asked for time to think it over.

"Quite right, my boy," said he approvingly, "quite right; never do nothing in a hurry. You'd like to talk things over with the missis, I dare say; but, bless you, I know she'll be on my side. As sensible a little woman as ever stepped is your good lady, sir. You're sure you won't have another drop? Very well, then, I'll say good morning, and expect you to look in some time to-morrow."

When I did "talk things over with the missis," that sensible little woman soon extirpated from my mind the germ of an idea of casting in my lot with Mr. Ripple, which I confess had established itself there.

"My dear Henry," she exclaimed, "you don't mean to say you seriously think of condemning yourself and me to lifelong association with such odiously vulgar people?"

"No, no, my love," I hastened to reply, "I don't. Only, you know, if our well-meaning friend's dream were fulfilled, we might become as rich as brewers."

"Ah," said my wife, "'if' and 'might' are all very well, but I prefer a prospect in the indicative mood such as the 'Hour' offers. Besides, think of the position. Think of the people with whom we shall be brought in contact."

As I quite endorse Mr. Ripple's opinion of my wife's sagacity, I allowed myself to be persuaded to write a polite but frigid note in the third person beginning, "Mr. Trevor presents his compliments to Mr. Ripple," and declining his offer. The next day we carried out our original intention; but our Camberwell landlady must have betrayed her trust, for Mrs. Ripple called several times at our new abode. As we felt it was no good to do things by halves, we were never at home to her, and at last we tired her out.

For the next two years we saw nothing either of her or her husband. We heard of them, though—at least in common with the rest of civilised mankind, we heard of "Ripple's Relish." As everybody knows, that condiment became world-famous after the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's applied for an injunction to restrain its proprietor from displaying his favourite injunction, "Try Ripple's Relish," upon the dome of that venerable fane by means of a magic lantern and the electric light.

Soon after the trial of this action assured the future of "Ripple's Relish," "The Passing Hour" passed away for ever, and I was once more reduced to a condition of most acute impecuniosity. In my necessity I wrote to Mr. Ripple reminding him of our former friendship, and offering once more to devote my pen to his service on his own terms.

Ah me! His terms are fairly liberal, but when I see my employer positively rolling in affluence, and think of what might have been, bitterness fills my soul. Yet I cannot blame myself, I cannot even blame my wife. As I have asked before, how were we to know?

BHOPAL.

The jungle-clothed hills of Central India separate the province of Bhopal from the outside world, and although the railway traverses the remote native state, the country remains almost undisturbed by the passing traffic to which it only offers an infinitesimal contribution.

The principality of Bhopal possesses the distinction of being the only native province under petticoat government; and her Highness, the Begum, a widowed Mohammedan Princess in her fiftieth year, rules over a million subjects, the annual revenue of three hundred thousand pounds giving her a distinguished position among native royalties.

Women have always exercised an important political influence in India, and the seclusion of "purdah" often veils the hand which pulls the strings of complicated schemes and subtle intrigues; but the records of modern times show few instances of regal authority placed entirely in female hands. The Begum of Bhopal was one of those native potentates who proved their loyalty to England by contributing large sums of money towards the expenses of the campaign in 1888 for the defence of the Indian frontiers, and the substantial aid provided by the tributary Princess of this retired province amounted to sixteen lakhs of rupees, equivalent to six hundred and forty thousand pounds sterling.

The capable administration of Bhopal proclaims the decided character and acute intelligence of the native Ranee, educated far beyond the usual modern standard of an Oriental sovereign, and adding a knowledge of English and Sanscrit to the classic Persian, which is studied as the sacred

tongue of Islam and adopted as the orthodox language of every Mohammedan Court.

This accomplished Begum has also written a valuable book on female life and influence, in the hope of elevating the moral and intellectual tone of Indian womanhood in the higher classes. For this purpose the stately Urdu — musical as Italian and sonorous as Greek—is the chosen medium of communication. This pure type of Hindustani, on the lips of native aristocracy, differs entirely in pronunciation and structure from the guttural dialects in common use, which exemplify the various degrees of decadence from comparative culture to absolute barbarism. The Begum has taken an important step in the direction of modern progress by defraying the expenses of a medical education for one of the ladies of her court. This dusky damsel showed such special aptitude for her professional studies that, on completing her university course at Calcutta, she was sent to England for further advantages before returning to practise in her native city, where the stringent regulations of "purdah" and "zenana" forbid any acceptance of medical aid unless offered at the hands of a woman.

The Mohammedan conquerors of Bhopal apparently contented themselves with establishing an hereditary dynasty in the province; and, though the reins of government were held in an iron grasp, the seclusion of the capital—destitute of special manufactures and separated by mountain and forest from the great caravan routes between north and south—prevented the erection of those architectural memorials which signalise the conquests of Islam in more accessible districts. The steep precipices of the Ghauts and the perils of the pathless jungle barred the way of progress, and forbade that "education of contact" which rouses local emulation and fans the spark of aspiration into the flame of achievement.

The sleeping city of Bhopal, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot," still presents unusual difficulties to the social reformer, and awakes from the dreams of ages by almost imperceptible degrees. The station stands on a sunburnt heath outside the walls, and a little dâk bungalow on a ridge of the tawny moorland offers a rude shelter to the European traveller who breaks his journey through Central India at secluded Bhopal. The advent of visitors excites the lively interest of the local Jehus, and sundry primitive tongas, drawn by hump-backed white bullocks, arrive at the door of the rustic bungalow, while we discuss "chota hazri" in the latticed verandah as the roseate dawn pales the lingering stars and flushes the dreary moorland with pink and lilac hues. Diving beneath a yellow awning, with our feet dangling from the springless cart, we subside into a heap of fragrant hay, placed for the accommodation of passengers in the least objectionable of the barbaric vehicles at our command. A noisy brown native, clad in the slightly modified costume of Paradise, acts as charioteer, and with unnecessary outlay of ill-directed energy galvanises the long-suffering bullock into such a rapid trot that the whole attention of the fares is absorbed, for the first mile of the expedition, by the strenuous efforts required to avoid an ignominious fall into the dusty road.

The break-neck pace slackens to a deliberate amble within the city gates, as we mingle with the gaily-clad crowds which fill the gaudy bazaars with colour and movement. Robes of orange and blue, scarlet and purple, yellow and green, glow with dazzling brilliancy in the keen light of the morning sun, the vivid tints of turban and sari enhanced by the multitude of nude bronze figures which divide the comparative popularity of dress and undress into equal proportions. Although the common trades of India may be studied in the crumbling arcades and tumbledown stalls of the Bhopal streets, not a single instance of local invention or artistic handiwork rewards our exploration of dusty passages, dilapidated balconies, and dim chambers filled with heterogeneous merchandise.

Even the all-pervading commerce of the West, which gains a footing in every native city and shoots tons of rubbish into Eastern bazaars, obtains but a feeble hold on the affections of Central India; and the archaic patterns of all European goods show that the foreign element meets with scant favour in this old-world state.

Shady roads branch out in every direction beneath the dense foliage of towering palm, feathery tamarind, and blossoming neem-tree, where green parrots and chattering mynas dispute the position with the ubiquitous and impertinent Indian crow. There are no sidewalks. The throngs of foot-passengers jostle against mules, bullocks, and camels, palanquins borne on bare brown shoulders, palm-thatched waggons, and prancing horses ridden by turbaned soldiers. Grey Brahmini cows perambulate the narrow streets, and the continual aggressions of these pampered animals afford

some excuse for the raids of the Moslem population, which occasionally wages savage war against the sacred herds. Personal experience certainly suggests a secular rather than a religious origin to the "Cow Riots," which often assume the proportions of a civil war, for the patience of the unbeliever is sorely taxed by the perpetual encroachments of the symbolical kine. The reverence shown to the cow as the type of Nature's beneficence resembles the cultus of Ceres in the early days of Greece, and the veneration paid to the sacred animal of Hindu theology dates from that distant past when the myths of the primitive world reflected the pastoral life which belonged to the so-called golden age.

A lordly elephant led by a turbaned mahout terrifies the frisky horses, which dash frantically aside as though fearing to be trodden under foot, or gored by the sweeping ivory curves so carefully guided by the attendants of the royal stud. Houses painted in glaring tints of red, blue, and ochre enliven the dim alleys and irregular streets, the external surface of every wall covered with a white tracery representing Hindu gods and mythological animals. The gnarled trunk of an ancient peepul-tree forms a diminutive chapel where a vermilion-tinted divinity looms in grotesque outline through the shadows; and weird images with glittering crowns gleam from the cavernous arches of a dusky temple. Two lotus-covered tanks cool the burning air of the stifling city, which lies in a hollow of the moorland, and is shut in by the green zone of wooded hills which encircles Central India. Slender minarets and pearly domes indicate the prevailing creed, but mosque and temple are alike destitute of architectural beauty and historical interest.

The sharp sunlight darts like gleaming sword-blades through the fringe of foliage which overhangs the placid water, where groups of bathers dive among the azure lilies, and sportive children wind the tangled verdure round their slim brown bodies as they splash in and out of the tranquil pool, or sun themselves on the marble steps kissed by the rippling wavelets. A woman with pink draperies girt closely round her slender limbs makes an impromptu cradle of a gigantic leaf above a green mesh of swaying stalks, and lays her dusky baby upon this floating raft while she washes her white sári. A crumbling archway frames a long perspective of gilded colonnades at the side of a street, glowing with light and colour; and a tall Hindu in the dark uniform of his race leads two cheetahs, purring and hissing like huge cats, at the end of a long chain, and giving a strange touch of barbaric life to the unfamiliar scene.

The stately palace of the Begum stands near the city walls, and commands extensive views of the brown wilderness which skirts the dark depths of impenetrable jungle. The broken outlines of innumerable spires and cupolas, white as snow and bristling with spiky pinnacles, cut sharply into the radiant blue of the Indian sky. A colossal gateway faces the street, where turbaned guards pace up and down, armed with matchlock and spear. Native servants in striped tunics gossip with the crowds which pace to and fro, engaged in the multitudinous business of the royal household, or waiting for an audience either with the sovereign or with her Ministers of State. The Prime Minister's carriage, a ramshackle barouche drawn by prancing Arab horses, awaits his exit from the Council Chamber, and he emerges from the palace clad in flowing robes and glittering with jewelled orders. A grey-haired chamberlain accompanies him to the gate and courteously enquires our errand in perfect English. On ascertaining our desire to see the palace he graciously offers to ask the royal permission for a favour seldom granted, as the constant residence of the native Court generally renders the interior of the edifice forbidden ground. In this instance the request wins an immediate consent, and we follow the dignified official into the huge building which surrounds three sides of a spacious quadrangle, where a brilliant concourse ebbs and flows in picturesque variety of costume and colour. Peasants bear bunches of bananas and baskets of vegetables to the servants' quarters; grooms fill clattering buckets at the central fountain; soldiers relieve guard; and turbaned sheiks, waiting for an audience, spread their prayer-carpets in a white arcade, and utilise the spare time in devotion. Merchants with bales of silk and embroidery for the ladies of the Court solace a long delay with gurgling hubble-bubbles; and solemn-looking greybeards, with long scrolls of parchment in their hands, discuss the contents of the closely-written pages as they lean on the marble basin of a brimming fountain, where blue doves and snowy pigeons preen and flutter their downy plumage in undisturbed security. The Mohammedan nations, always exemplary in their treatment of the animal world, regard the pigeon with especial

favour as "the bird of the Holy Spirit," and the sacred doves are supported by public subscription.

After a momentary pause while the Muezzin's noontide call to prayer rings from the minaret of the royal mosque, and our conductor prostrates himself towards Mecca with the Oriental simplicity which knows no shame in yielding public obedience to the dictates of religion, we follow him through an interminable suite of State apartments lavishly decorated with crude designs and glaring colours. Artificial flowers disfigure every room, and display an endless variety of tone and texture. Blossoms of wax and wool, feathers and foil, beads and muslin, stand as centre-pieces on exquisite tables of costly mosaic, or shelter their appalling ugliness under glass shades in every nook and corner. A huge trophy of waxen fruit occupies a tripod of sandalwood and mother-of-pearl, and a splendid Benares vase holds a glaring bouquet of red woollen roses. Coarse tablecloths of vulgar pattern and crude aniline dye hide the delicate ivory carving which covers chests of black teakwood with a web of filmy lace; and cushions of cotton-backed satin conceal the golden embroideries of a beautiful divan with a hideous medley of magenta and scarlet. Countless mirrors reflect the nightmare of colour, and the tawdry finery of the European element overpowers the harmonious beauty of native handiwork. In the pillared Durbar Hall, where the provincial Rajahs pay their homage to the Mohammedan Queen, a thick "purdah" hangs before the royal divan which is occupied by the Ranee when she gives audience to the native chieftains, who stand outside the impassable barrier which veils their sovereign. A stone cloister flanks a formal garden reserved for the exclusive use of royalty; miniature fountains play amid gay parterres; and gilded kiosks adorn a marble terrace, where the Begum and her only daughter spend the sunset hour when the cares of State are laid aside, and the stifling "purdah" is exchanged for the peace and coolness of the flower-filled pleasaunce.

An immense pavilion used as the summer palace encloses this green retreat, and contributes to the absolute retirement of the spot, to which no sound penetrates from the external world. The chamberlain unlocks a low-browed door with a key hanging from his golden chain of office, and admits us into a magnificent vaulted hall with stone pillars and arches elaborately carved, but plastered over with barbaric disregard of every artistic principle, and wreathed with wax flowers and artificial ivy, for which we are informed that her Highness has paid an almost incalculable sum. Lovely stands of Benares lacquer-work groan beneath the weight of musical boxes, mechanical toys, and cheap German prints. Glittering chandeliers dangle their crystal drops from the arched ceiling, ribbed and fluted like a cathedral roof, and common rag-dolls of English make stand in regiments on priceless cabinets of ebony and silver. Persian prayer-mats of softest hue lie on glaring carpets where red peonies sprawl over a green background, and geometrical patterns divide the coarse material into huge squares which suggest a fabric taken in by weekly instalments.

The royal mind has not yet learned to discriminate between the comparative value of native handicraft, representing centuries of artistic culture, and the discarded monstrosities of Western manufacture belonging to a past generation. The extraordinary conglomeration of absolute rubbish with perfect specimens of Indian art points to the transitional state which halts between two opinions. The early days of female emancipation in Eastern lands frequently show a promiscuous admiration of Western productions quite irrespective of their intrinsic worth, and intellectual ability is no criterion of judgement in questions of taste during this passing phase of blind enthusiasm. The old chamberlain speaks of his royal mistress with reverential affection, and we share his regret that the exigencies of time and travel forbid the delay involved by a personal interview with her Highness; but previous experience of the mode adopted by native royalty to impress the foreign mind with the importance of an audience, prevents the expression of any wish for an honour which is frequently postponed day after day until the magnitude of the favour is supposed to be duly impressed upon the recipient.

As the shadows lengthen across the sunburnt moorland, and a faint breeze whispers through the fluttering foliage of a drooping neem-tree which shades the entrance of the dâk bungalow, we descend the ridge of the heath to a little river where bullocks and ponies are drinking from the shallow current. Women in red sáris and cotton bodices which leave the brown waist bare, fill the tall clay jars gracefully poised on their dusky heads, and an aged man toils up

the rocky bank with a heavy water-skin dripping from his shoulder. Shaggy buffaloes lie down beneath a mossy crag where the stream expands into a wide pool; a native shepherd drives his long-haired flock to a distant fold; the tinkling sheep-bells echo softly through the stillness, and the pastoral charm of the tranquil scene exhales the aroma of that vanished past which for ever breathes through the present of the unchanging East. The bristling spikes and pinnacles of the royal palace stand out in white relief against the burning gold of the sunset sky; the pale minarets of the city mosques reflect the amber glow on every polished shaft; a purple bloom tinges the tawny heath; and as the little procession of peasants climbs the steep ascent from the shadowy glen, the last gleam of the setting sun sparkles on silver bangles and nose-rings, and turns a brazen lotah into a blaze of concentrated light.

In the small hours of the following morning, we stumble across the dusky moorland to the little station; the white turban of the porter who shoulders our trunks serving the purpose of a lantern in front of us. As the train threads the dense jungles of the Central Provinces, and skirts the steep acclivities of the wooded Ghauts, the isolation of Bhopal becomes evident, and we realise the difficulty of the problem to be solved by the native sovereign who strives to raise the status of her subjects by keeping them in touch with advancing knowledge, and teaching them to win for themselves a worthy place in the records of modern India.

BLIND LARRY.

A STORY IN TWO CHAPTERS. CHAPTER II.

The summer was far advanced before the Gossoon's first letter came. The red-painted "side" car drove in as usual about ten o'clock one sunny morning, and Taedey Coakley observed that he found it "mortal dhry"—not an unusual remark for him—as he handed the solitary mail-bag to Mrs. Lunan, who received it in the capacity of postmistress with a nonchalance that was ever the admiration of the village. It was a bracing experience to Gurteen—which was always fairly represented at the starting and arrival of the mail-car—to see the easy familiarity with which their post-mistress handled Her Majesty's mails. Some commended the exhibition, others shook their heads; and once old Ned Galagher, the stone-breaker, half accounted for, half excused the display of such super-human nerve by the fact that "the pore woman had buried three husbands." But that is by the way. The point Gurteen wished to emphasize afterwards was that there was really nothing that morning to show that there was a letter come for blind Larry at last, and that if Taedey Coakley knew about it, it was just like him—bad cess to him!—not to let on. However, the news was soon set afoot, and there had not been such a pleasant buzz of excitement in the village since Patsey O'Rourke left the tax collector for dead at the cross-roads.

Mrs. Lunan was the first to make the discovery—naturally. Then little Peggy stole in, barefooted, as she had done for many a day, to know if there was "e'er a Mericky letther for owld Larry;" and the austere official unwillingly produced her find from beneath her blue apron. But even into the administration of Government functions human nature forces its way, and Her Majesty's representative at Gurteen delivered up the letter with most unofficial tears in her eyes, saying: "Here 'tis fur him. Glory be to God! I was goin' to carry it up mesilf." Peggy clasped the precious thing to her ragged little bosom, and sped up the dusty street out of the village to the crumbling little hut on the hillside, where two or three breathless urchins, who had already brought the news, awaited her coming in intense excitement. On the crazy old settle sat Larry, his yearning eyes turned to the door, trembling all over in his eagerness; and when the child's light footstep touched the threshold—he had heard her eager panting draw nearer and nearer as she climbed the steep boreen—he stretched out his eager hands, crying, "Praise be to God, let me feel it!" Too breathless to say anything, Peggy laid her treasure in the old man's hands, and sat incontinently on the earthen floor watching the nervous fingers run caressingly over the envelope while she caught her breath. As she waited, the tiny room gradually filled with those who had heard the good news, and who hastened to rejoice with the blind man's joy; but not a word was spoken, for great tears stood in his eyes, and the women stood looking in silence, expressing their sympathy to each other by an animated dumb show. After a little, Judy Bralligan, assuming the duties of hostess, began to blow the wood-fire noisily.

"'Tis as good fur me to bile a grain av tea fur ye, while some one reads it to us," she said, addressing the rest.

Then came the difficulty, who was to read it? They were chiefly women who were present, for the men had gone to work, and to read print is one thing, but to read a letter written with pen and ink is another. Judy Bralligan opened it with a hairpin, and Larry held the empty envelope while they all tried, but no one got beyond: "New York, July 24th. Dear father, I hopes this finds——," and they had three tries each all round, and had finished the tea, when Father Murphy came in and settled the matter. The letter, which was short, told that the Gossoon was earning five dollars a week in a coal store, and that he hoped soon to get a rise, but beyond that he did not make mention of himself; the rest was filled with messages, more or less flippant, to everybody, and startling surmises as to the changes that had taken place since his departure—three months before. Then the cottage emptied gradually, and old Larry was left still holding his treasure in his hands.

For a week afterwards all who could read were invited to display their accomplishment in Larry's cottage, and by that time the old man knew by heart the words that were then completely obliterated by kindly, grimy fingers. In due time it was answered, and it was to me that Larry dictated what he wished to say. One sentence alone I will quote.

"Tell him," he said, "I seen a bright light shinin' whin I tuk the letther in me han's." I wonder what he meant? For he had never seen what we call light.

As time went on, more letters came—not many, but enough to make old Larry happy. He knew them all by heart, and could tell you the contents of each by running his finger over the first few lines. He sat all day in summer, and part of the day in winter, on the cliff, where he felt the wind from the west buffet his face, and then plaited creels with the green withes they brought him, always thankful for his health and tidings from the Gossoon; but he never touched his fiddle, at least in the day-time. He grew a little feeble in those years, and rheumatism bent his spare frame unmercifully; but his great grey eyes still wore the same look of steadfast patience as if, blind only to material things, they ever rested on something passing sweet in the far-away land where spirits live and move.

It was the fifth summer after the Gossoon had gone that a letter came telling that he was coming back to pay his native village a visit. And again every one flocked to the cabin on the hill to congratulate Larry, and talk it over with him. He stayed at home that day to receive his visitors, answering all with a happy smile and with the same words: "Ay, he's comin', sure enough. God is good, God is good." And in the evening he tuned his mildewed fiddle, and played "The Young May Moon" and "The O'Donoghue's Gathering" for Terence Flannigan's children.

Judy Bralligan hobbled up in a day or two, and was for putting the cottage straight against young Larry would come, suggesting a coat of whitewash outside, and a nail or two in the old settle.

"'Twould be like new," she asserted, "if ye nelt the west side av it on agin, an' spilt a drop av red paint on it."

But Larry would not hear of it.

"'Tis home he's comin'," he said, "an' he must find it as he left it, or 'twouldn't be like home at all, at all. 'Tis a rapper on the door widout, an' blinds in the windies ye'll be wanting nixt," he added, with a fine sarcasm.

So things were left as they were, and the cottage waited in all the glory of its dilapidation for the coming of the heir, with its summer crop of young oats and yellow weed waving cheerily on the remnant of thatch, and the blue turf smoke gently welling through the open door. Larry plaited his creels at home all day, never venturing out lest the Gossoon would come in his absence; and when a step sounded faintly from the road below he would pause in his work, and the slender withes, projecting from the half-finished basket, would quiver in his trembling hands until the sound died away or came close enough to be identified. Then came another letter, from Queenstown this time, telling that the Gossoon had landed and would be home in two days, and it was arranged that Con Deasey should go to Dunmanway to meet him with the same cart—and, indeed, the same horse—with which he had driven him there five years before.

"'Twill be a raäl home-comin' fur him," he said to me, with child-like joy in his face. "The first thing he'll clap eyes on whin he leps out av the thrain, will be Con an' the owld horse; 'twill be raäl home, glory be to God; nauthin' sthrange or new, only all owld friends."

At last the great day came. Larry was up by daybreak, groping his way about the two rooms, to make sure that everything was in its accustomed place. With his own hands he rolled the block of wood and set

it on end by the corner of the settle with the only chair at the other side, so that he and the Gossoon might breakfast together as they used; for Con was to bring him home by noon, and Larry determined to eat nothing until then. Indeed, he was too excited to do anything but wander to and fro through the cottage and tell his beads again and again in his thankfulness.

Old Judy looked in early, and once more ventured on a suggestion that a real table, with legs, might be substituted for the block, and offered to provide a tablecloth and a whole cup and saucer; but her ideas were scouted by Larry.

"Maybe the boy will have fine notions in him now, afther he being over for so long," she hazarded.

"What talk have ye av notions, arrah?" enquired the old man. "'Tis home he's comin', an' 'tis the same owld cup wid the bit out av the north side av it he'll be looking fur, an' not any av ye're quality chaney!"

So Judy retired beaten again, though this time she succeeded in getting leave to bake a cake with a half-stone of "seconds" she had bought at the mill on Saturday, and bring it up at twelve o'clock with "a thrashcaun av butter to mois'en it." After that the morning went slowly for Larry, though he tried to make his creels as usual. Now and again a neighbour looked in to say, "Is he wid ye yet?" to which Larry would make answer, "Not yet, thank ye kindly." And so the day wore on until eleven o'clock, when Terence Flannigan turned in as he passed with the usual question, and told Larry the time by the big steel watch which he lost in the autumn when he was cutting turf, and found again by the sound of its ticking in a furze-bush ten yards from where he stood. He consulted its weather-beaten face for some time, and then declared it to be "nigh on eleven, the sun was so high above," and the blind man prayed to the Virgin that his last hour of waiting might not be so long as the others, and went on plaiting the creel he held between his knees. He paused presently to listen to a light footstep approaching quickly, and turned his eager face to the door as Peggy, now a slender maid of fifteen, but still barefooted, came in. She ran to his side and knelt there, laying one little brown hand on his long white fingers while she tossed back her tangled brown hair to look into his face.

"They've come," she panted.

"Who?" asked the blind man, starting and letting his work slip to the ground.

"The Gossoon an' ——" The girl stopped.

"Glory be to God! An' is he finely now, tell me?" cried Larry, clasping his trembling hands.

"He is, faith, indeed, an' he have a weskit of fur under the coat, an' a goold chain hangin' be a watch."

"Thanks be to God that brought him to me so safe an' so quick," said the old man, with the tears running down his face.

"Ay, 'tis quick he was, fur 'tis in a side car av Dempsey's in Dunmanway he come, and Con Deasey isn't back at all yit."

"A side car? An' lift Con behind?" Larry repeated slowly. "'Tis the way he thought it too long till he was here. Go to the door, asthore, an' see is he comin' up the road."

"He's below in Casey's shop, talkin'," said the girl slowly, watching the blind man's face with pain in her bright eyes.

"Ay, they'll be askin' him all about Mericky," said Larry, with something like pride.

"He'd have come up before to ye," said the girl quickly, "only she said——"

"Who said, Peggy, avic?"

"She said. Sure he have a wife wid him!"

The old man grew ashy white, and trembled piteously.

"A mortal nate lump av a girl," Peggy hurried on, looking anxiously at the poor white face and frightened eyes. "She have a hat an' feather, an' shiny boots, an' a blue umbrella, an'—all," and she paused anxiously, watching the effect of her words, while Larry sat still, only catching at his breath with dry sobs and wringing his thin fingers together.

"She have goold rings on the fingers av her, an' goold dhrops in her ears. She's just a raäl lady," the girl went on, without taking her eyes off his face. "An' they're all sayin' below 'tis a great match he've made entirely."

"Ay, it is that, it is that, sure," cried he, struggling with his dismay. "God forgive the selfish heart that's in me this day! On'y, oh, Peggy, alannah! he'll never be me Gossoon no more! But whisht! I mustn't talk like that, 'tisn't right. The good God has provided fur him. 'Tis thankful I ought to be that he's safe an' sound, an' I am—I am thankful, God knows," and at the last words his voice rose almost to a cry, and he flung his head

back as one who looked to heaven, letting it fall upon his breast again. For a long time neither spoke. Peggy still knelt by his side, bending her brown head from time to time to dry her tears with her elbow before they should fall on the cold hands she held in both hers—for she loved the lonely blind man, who had always been so gentle and good to her, and her tender heart bled for him now.

The bright sun shone on the flagstone outside the dim little room, and all the air was filled with soft summer sounds—the chatter of the martins as they dipped and soared in the blue; the sleepy hum of the myriad insect life of August; the distant whetting of a scythe; and, mingling with all, the shrill murmur of the little waves at play as they lost their footing on the beach and ran laughing back to leap again. Only in the cottage there was silence while the blind man waited for his son.

The chapel bell sent its mellow tones throbbing through the sunlight at noon; and, at the well-known call to prayer, the old man made the sign of the Holy Cross on his bosom, and whispered a Paternoster to heaven with a prayer for pity in his aching loneliness. The day wore on, and the sun climbed down the heaven until its bright rays crept in sideways at the door and window. The silver sunlight moved round to the hearth and passed on until it rested on the white hair of the blind man, and showed all the agony in his pale, drawn face with a distinctness that seemed brutal; but he never stirred or sought to shield himself from its fierce heat. At last—when four o'clock had come and gone—at last, after those long hours of waiting, the firm step of a man climbed the steep boreen and approached the door. The bent head by the hearth was raised to listen with a despairing intentness, and as the sound drew nearer a light of joy that was altogether holy shone on the weary, white face. In a moment all the dreary waiting, all the bitterness of disappointment was forgotten, and the blind man arose with trembling, outstretched hands, crying:

"Tis he! It is my son! Glory be to the good God."

As he spoke the door was darkened, and the Gossoon came in. He paused for a moment and glanced round the room, and then going to his father, slowly enough, stood silently while the old man laid his hands on his shoulders and sobbed with joy and thankfulness.

"Sure I knew ye'd come, Larry, avic, though they kep ye from me. Spake to me, my son, spake a word to me!"

"Don't ye take on like that, now. I'm all right, and blamed glad to see ye; I am, straight," said the Gossoon, glancing uneasily over his shoulder towards the door.

"Ay, 'tis his voice," said the old man brokenly, "on'y ye spake like a man. Ah, Larry, boy, many a time I've prayed on me binded knees to be alive fur this, an' sure the Howly Vargin heered me, praise be to her. An' 'tis a fine suit of clothes ye have," he added with pride, running his fingers over everything, "an' a chain wid watch in the pocket, I'll be bound. Look at that, now! 'Deed, I have no doubt ye're a fine hearty man too, God bless ye; I have to rise me han's to put them on the two big shoulders av ye."

The Gossoon, who was barely an average specimen of man, and an unlovely one to boot, laughed a pleased laugh at this, and old Larry laughed with joy at the sound, and told his son to sit by him while Peggy would boil the kettle and make a cup of tea. The Gossoon sat down as he was bid, with his father holding his hand and asking questions without waiting for an answer. The existence of his wife seemed forgotten by all except young Larry, who cast anxious glances at the door from time to time, and looked with some dissatisfaction round him at the cottage where he had spent his childhood. Once or twice he would have said something that would have jarred terribly on his father had not Peggy, watching him from the hearth where she sat with the bellows on her knee, seen it in his eyes, and, nothing abashed by the moleskin waistcoat and watch-chain, flashed a glance of such virulent warning at him that the words never came.

Then Judy Bralligan brought her promised cake, apologising garrulously for its late appearance, which she said was because she had "ne'er a stick in the house to make a bit of fire until she gathered a brusna with her own two han's in the woodeen east av Father Murphy's." But Peggy knew that Judy could see from the window of her shop at the corner when the Gossoon left the village, and had waited until she saw him go. Soon the tea was made, and Judy was invited to partake of her own baking, and the trio drew together round the log table while Peggy waited on them, keeping a threatening eye on the Gossoon, who seemed to think it but poor fare for a welcome home. Not so old Larry. Worn out with watching and

disappointment, and seeing nothing of his son's dissatisfaction, his spirits rose, and he sat quietly happy when the Gossoon began to talk of himself and his magnificent prospects in the coal store in New York. He talked big, and talked loud, with a fine independent spirit, and his father was proud of him, and asked the others from time to time, "Did they hear that, now?" and "Would they believe it?" to which old Judy and Peggy answered in tones of becoming respect and awe, while they openly discarded the young man's boasting and interchanged looks of incredulity, not to say derision. Indeed, matters came to such a pitch that old Judy, from pure malice, kept on stirring her tea with the spoon—there was only one—though she knew the Gossoon was waiting for it.

But old Larry knew nothing of this. He only knew that his son was come back, and was sitting next him as he used to sit when he was a boy, and in listening to his voice he forgot the years of loneliness and the disappointment of the morning—forgot, too, that the Gossoon was a married man now, and that there was a wife at hand who would always have the first claim on him. He began to tell young Larry how he had lived on his letters while he was away, how he knew them all by heart, and how good it was to have him back again for a while, and then he went on to tell how they would spend their time together and everything would be as it used to be. He would play "The Night of the Fun," he said, if Peggy would reach him the fiddle, and he was stretching out his hand with a happy smile on his noble face to take it from the girl, when the door was darkened again by some one who paused on the threshold. The Gossoon started away a little, but his father, whose quick ear had heard the step, held him gently next him with his left hand, saying:

"Kape ye're sate, Larry boy," and turning his wonderful face round cried: "Come in, neighbour, an' hear the music that's ris to life in me again."

"It ain't no music that I wants," said the new-comer, advancing, "it's jest that husband of mine they said was here. Lord, what a hole!"

Larry paused with his fiddle still held at arm's length.

"Who's that?" he asked in a puzzled voice.

"It's me wife," said the Gossoon sullenly.

The fiddle fell with a hollow crash to the ground, and laying both his hands on his son's arm, he held him tight while the colour died from his face and the pallor seemed to flash into it; but in a moment he recovered himself, and stretching out his right hand he said, with an effort:

"If ye're my son's wife, ye're my daughter. Come here to me, my—daughter."

She was a young woman, with coarse dark hair and bold black eyes, wearing a light, half-soiled summer costume, and carrying a blue silk parasol that looked as if it had taken life hardly. She was taken aback at first when old Larry had grasped his son's arm and turned his white face to her; but now, when he spoke gently, she coolly scanned the room, ignoring alike the hand that was stretched out to her and the furious glances of the other two women.

"Lord, what a hole!" she repeated. "I judge this ain't your father's house, Lawrence?"

"It is," muttered the Gossoon, without raising his eyes from the ground.

"An' ye're welcome to it," said Larry, still holding out his hand.

"And is this what you've been and brought me to?" cried the woman, flaring up, completely ignoring the old man's gesture. "If you want to set eyes on me again, come out of it now—this minute."

The Gossoon rose from his seat on the settle, and the blind man rose with him, a speechless agony in his face.

"Let me go," said the younger man sulkily, trying to loosen his father's grasp on his arm.

"Oh, my God!" cried the old man shrilly, not noticing what his son was doing, but turning towards the strange voice, "oh, my God! will ye take him from me?"

"Are you coming out of this? It isn't fit for a dog to live in," repeated the woman.

"Let me go, I tell ye," said the Gossoon, jerking his arm sullenly from the nerveless fingers that held it, and moving with downcast eyes towards the door.

As he passed his wife she laid a hand on his arm and pushed him on; and turning to the blind man who stood where his son had left him, his hand still as if in the act of grasping, she said, with a shade of softening in her voice:

"See here, old man, me and Lawrence will send you something, and you git a decent house over you and a new coat on your back. Maybe we'll just look round again," and she followed her husband out.

Motionless, as if carved in stone, the gaunt figure stood, still with outstretched hand, while the footsteps sounded more and more faintly down the road, and died away into silence.

Suddenly the blind man woke from his trance, and with an inarticulate cry full of unshed tears raised his hands on high; then flinging them out with a piteous gesture of entreaty, he started forward, crying:

"My son, my son! Give me back my son!"

He had forgotten his blindness, and moved quickly to the door; but in his path lay the half-finished creel he was working at that morning, and striking his foot against it he fell helplessly across the threshold. In a moment the women were kneeling by him—the girl choking with sobs, the older woman praying aloud through her slower tears. Tenderly and with much labour they raised him and laid him on his humble bed, and bathed his bleeding forehead with icy water from the spring. When he opened his eyes again he bade them prepare a welcome for his son who was coming home, he said, and would never leave him again; and Peggy must go down to the village to see if he were come.

With flying feet the girl did go, praying that she might bring the Gossoon back once more with her. But it was evening then, and they were gone—young Larry and his wife—back to Dunmanway on their way to Queenstown. Slowly returning, she told the sick man to wait a little longer.

He smiled contentedly, and said nothing. Presently he asked for his rosary, and lying there in the summer twilight he told his beads in a low voice, giving thanks to God for a son so loving and so true. And when he had finished, he turned on his side and slept.

But before the light in the east wakened the martins to chatter 'neath the eaves, and roused the lark to shatter the rosy stillness with his matin song; before the sea took up its day-dream once more and whispered it to the red-brown rocks that leaned in the sand; he woke—not here, but in that far country where waiting is easy and weariness has no place.

For while the world lay wrapped in the dusk of summer dark, the blind man had gone out into the light.

NOTE.

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ROYAL NATIONAL LIFE-BOAT INSTITUTION

INCORPORATED BY ROYAL CHARTER.—SUPPORTED SOLELY BY VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS.

Patron—Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen.

President—His Grace the DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND, K.G.
Chairman—SIR EDWARD BIRKBECK, Bart., *V.P.*
Deputy Chairman—COLONEL FITZ-ROY CLAYTON, *V.P.*
Secretary—CHARLES DIBDIN, Esq., F.R.G.S.

APPEAL.

THE Committee of the Royal National Life-Boat Institution earnestly appeal to the British Public for Funds to enable them to maintain their 308 Life-Boats now on the Coast and their Crews in the most perfect state of efficiency. This can only be effected by a large and permanent annual income. The Annual Subscriptions, Donations and Dividends are quite inadequate for the purpose. The Committee are confident that in their endeavour to provide the brave Lifeboatmen, who nobly hazard their lives in order that they may save others, with the best possible means for carrying on their great work, they will meet with the entire approval of the people of this the greatest maritime country in the world, and that their appeal will not be made in vain, so that the scope and efficiency of our great life-saving service, of which the Nation has always been so proud, may not have to be curtailed.

The Institution granted rewards for the saving of 428 lives by the Life-Boats in 1893, and of 170 lives by fishing and other boats during the same period, the total number of lives, for the saving of which the Institution granted rewards, in 1893 being **598**. Total of lives saved, for which Rewards have been granted, from the Establishment of the Institution in 1824 to 25th October, 1894, **38,381**.

The cost of a Life-Boat Station is at least **£1,050**, which includes **£700** for the Life-Boat and her equipment, including Life-Belts for the crew, and Transporting Carriage for the Life-Boat, and **£350** for the Boat-house (Slipway extra). The approximate annual expense of maintaining a Life-Boat Station is **£100**.

Annual Subscriptions and Donations will be thankfully received by the Secretary, Charles Dibdin, Esq., at the Institution, 14 John Street, Adelphi, London, W.C.; by the Bankers of the Institution, Messrs. Coutts and Co., 59 Strand; by all the other Bankers in the United Kingdom; and by all the Life-boat Branches.

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ROYAL NATIONAL LIFE-BOAT INSTITUTION.

The Right Hon. Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, M.P., when President of the Board of Trade, stated at the Annual Meeting of the Life-Boat Institution on the 30th April, 1892:—

"In the work of saving life at sea the Life-Boat Institution takes the larger part, not only as regards the number of lives saved and money spent, but **also as regards the efficiency of the work done. I have never had brought before my notice one single case in which the crews of the Life-Boats have failed to do their duty.**"

The Right Hon. A. J. Mundella, M.P., when President of the Board of Trade, said at the Annual Meeting on the 18th March, 1893:—

"**No Government department could ever do the work as well as the National Life-Boat Institution.** No Government department would ever maintain that alertness and alacrity which the Governors of that Institution always exhibited; and no Government department could ever evoke that generous sympathy with heroism which has characterised the work of the Institution. I trust the time will never come when the English public will abdicate their duty and their highest privilege of supporting such a noble Institution."

The Right Hon. the Earl Spencer, K.G., First Lord of the Admiralty, stated at the Annual Meeting of the Life-Boat Institution on the 21st April, 1894:—

"A work like this is done entirely voluntarily without assistance from the State, and in this country I think we take a great pride in this. **The Institution has a great claim on the country. . . . It does a great and a national work.** On this account it has a claim on the generosity and liberality of the people."

The Right Hon. A. B. Forwood, M.P., when Secretary to the Admiralty, stated in public at Liverpool:—

"The Admiralty have no machinery whatever for working the Life-Boat Service, and **I am decidedly of opinion that the best and, indeed, the only way that this work can be carried on is by the existing organisation.**"

The Right Hon. the Lord Mayor of London, when presiding at a meeting at the Mansion House on the 13th June, 1894, *said*:—

"The Royal National Life-Boat Institution is one of the most meritorious and useful voluntary institutions in this the greatest maritime country of the world. Indeed, **there is perhaps no society which better deserves the financial support of the citizens of London.**"

The Right Hon. J. Bryce, M.P., President of the Board of Trade, said in the House of Commons on the 18th August, 1894:—

"**The National Life-boat Institution deserves the confidence of the people.**"

On the 25th October, 1894, the Institution had granted altogether in rewards since its establishment in 1824, **98** Gold Medals and Clasps, **1,139** Silver Medals and Clasps, **244** Binocular Glasses, **15** Telescopes, **7** Aneroid Barometers, **44** Framed Certificates of Service, **1,479** Votes of Thanks inscribed on Vellum and framed, and **£145,500** in money.

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